



U.S. Department of Justice

United States Attorney

Eastern District of Pennsylvania

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 14, 2006

THREE CHARGED IN CONSPIRACY TO COLLECT HUMAN SMUGGLING DEBT

PHILADELPHIA – United States Attorney Patrick L. Meehan today announced the unsealing of an indictment ¹ charging 3 Chinese nationals with conspiracy to use force, violence and threats to attempt to collect a \$90,000 smuggling debt owed by a Chinese woman who was smuggled into the U.S. with her minor son on April 18, 2003.

The woman and her child were smuggled out of China into the U.S. through JFK International Airport in New York City by “snakeheads”, an international human smuggling network operating from the People’s Republic of China. According to the indictment, snakehead organizations arrange for Chinese aliens to be smuggled out of China to places around the world, including the U.S., for substantial fees. The snakeheads advance the expenses necessary to smuggle aliens into the U.S., and provide the transportation, food and lodging and phony travel documents enabling the alien to leave China. Once the smuggled aliens arrive in the U.S. they are required to pay off the debt. Snakeheads routinely use force and violence and threat of violence to collect these debts from the smuggled aliens and their families in the U.S. and China.

“To these defendants, someone’s search for freedom is simply leverage for control and collection,” said Meehan. “And given the reputation of this organization in China, there was no reason for this mother and child to believe that the defendants wouldn’t make good on their threats.”

The indictment charges that defendant Mei Qiao Zheng, who resides in China, was the snakehead recruiter who arranged and coordinated the smuggling of the Chinese woman and her child from Fujian Province, China into the U.S. for a fee of \$90,000. Defendants Yan Yu Zheng, a/k/a “Aunti Bi” and her husband defendant Min Zhang Zheng, a/k/a “Uncle”, who live and work in Philadelphia, were associates of Mei Qiao Zheng and served as debt collectors for her. The indictment charges that between April 2003 and March 2004, the defendants at various times in telephone conversations with the victim, used coercion, intimidation and threats of violence against the woman, her child and her family in China, to attempt to collect the smuggling debt. The victim was warned that if would be impossible to hide from the snakeheads and her child would be taken. At one point the victim was threatened that her child’s hand would be cut off if the money was not paid. She was told that the snakeheads would collect thousands of dollars more from her and force her to pay interest.

¹ An Indictment is an accusation. A defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

INFORMATION REGARDING THE DEFENDANT

NAME	ADDRESS	AGE
Mei Qiao Zheng	Fujian Province, China	Unknown
Yan Yu Zheng	Philadelphia, PA	DOB: 8/8/64
Min Zhang Zheng	Philadelphia, PA	DOB: 5/16/58

If convicted, the defendants face a maximum possible sentence of 20 years imprisonment, a \$250,000 fine, three years of supervised release and a \$100 special assessment.

The case was investigated by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and has been assigned to Assistant United States Attorney Suzanne B. Ercole of the Organized Crime Strike Force.

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